

Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, August 1, 2014

Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. Blog post offers suggestions on teaching [standards](#) “without becoming standardized”
2. Newly constituted [Board of Education](#) to hold its first meeting Monday
3. U.S. Department of Education recognizes Rhode Island partnership between libraries, [adult education](#)

From the R.I. Department of Education (RIDE)

Educator Evaluations:

4. RIDE issues guidance on new legislation regarding [annual evaluation](#) of teachers

Health & Safety:

5. New School and Youth Programs Concussion Act requires additional training for all [school nurses](#)

From the U.S. Department of Education

6. U.S. Department of Education issues guidance on use of [student data](#)

From other state agencies and offices

7. Attorney General's Office schedules additional [criminal-background check](#) services

From other organizations

8. New England Institute of Technology offers free [professional development](#) for high-school educators

Action Item Calendar

August 8: Proposal deadline for Technology [Conference](#)
September 1: Program Quality Improvement [grantees](#) reports due
September 30: [UCOA FY 2014](#) data due

Notes from Commissioner Gist

- 1. Blog post offers suggestions on teaching standards
“without becoming standardized”**

If you follow me on Twitter, you may have seen me state that “standards” do not equal “standardization.” This week I came across an excellent [post](#) on the KQED Mind/Shift blog, “How to Teach the Standards Without Becoming Standardized,” by Katrina

Schwartz. She notes that the Common Core State Standards “focus on developing students’ skills rather than [on] specific content areas,” but that teachers still may be tempted to “teach to the test.” She writes that “it often seems easier or safer to standardize instruction instead of trusting educators to engage and challenge students.”

Schwartz quotes several educators who offer ideas about teaching “past the test,” and her blog post includes 8 “strategies for teaching standards in authentic ways.” For example, Schwartz suggests: “*Teach students to question.* When kids develop effective questioning techniques they become active partners in constructing learning. They can shape and create meaning by questioning, if educators encourage them to do so.”

The ideas in this post can help all of us as we continue to work toward providing our students with inspiring and engaging instruction that is aligned with the Common Core standards and that responds to individual student needs.

2. Newly constituted Board of Education to hold its first meeting Monday

The newly constituted Board of Education with its two Councils will hold its first meeting on Monday (August 4), at 5:30 p.m., at the Whispering Pines Center (Alton Jones campus, University of Rhode Island, 401 Victory Highway, West Greenwich). Agenda topics include discussion of dual-enrollment policies for secondary and postsecondary education and an update on the graduation figures for the Class of 2014. I look forward to working with Board Chair Mancuso, with Elementary and Secondary Council Chair Guida, with Postsecondary Education Council Chair Bernstein and Postsecondary Education Commissioner Purcell, and with the

returning and newly appointed members of the Board of Education as we prepare for another great year of teaching and learning!

3. U.S. Department of Education recognizes Rhode Island partnership between libraries, adult education

I'm pleased to note that the U.S. Department of Education Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education has recognized a Rhode Island program as a model for partnerships between adult-education programs and libraries toward helping adults become "digitally literate." In its July 25 online blot [OCTAE Connection](#), the Office cites the [All Access in the Libraries](#) program at the Cranston and Providence Public Libraries as an example of best practices toward integrating adult education and workforce services. Our adult-education team at RIDE has supported this program.

And speaking of the U.S. Department of Education, Education Secretary Duncan has appointed Johan Uvin, our former adult-education director at RIDE, as the acting assistant secretary in charge of the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education. You can read Johan's letter to his team [here](#). Congratulations to Johan on this exciting development in his career!

From RIDE

Educator Evaluations:

4. RIDE issues guidance on new legislation regarding annual evaluation of teachers

Recently passed legislation, H 7096 Sub B, on educator evaluation introduces limitations to the *frequency* with which any tenured

teacher may be evaluated. The legislation still requires each LEA to have an approved evaluation system for implementation. This is the first of two guidance documents and attends to the issues that affect planning for the upcoming school year. The second document will focus on longer-term issues, including the implications for certification renewal now that there will not be annual evaluation results for teachers.

Defining Evaluation

For the purposes of this guidance document, it is necessary to distinguish summative evaluation within an approved educator-evaluation system from the ongoing supervision of staff for instructional improvement that is required in all LEAs. The summative evaluation that occurs under an approved system yields a summative score that is currently connected to certification renewal. Ongoing supervision may include practices such as observations, conferencing, examining student performance, and other forms of providing feedback that result in the improvement of teaching and learning. Information from ongoing supervision may be used for locally determined purposes, but this information does not result in a summative score reported to RIDE.

Affected Educators

The legislation stipulates an evaluation cycle for tenured teachers who receive Highly Effective and Effective ratings. Specifically, the legislation notes that a cyclical process will be in place following the receipt of either of these two ratings; therefore the 2013-14 ratings will determine the cyclical options. Tenured teachers who did not receive an evaluation rating during the previous school year for any reason must be part of a full, summative evaluation in coming school year (2014-15). Teachers who are using a certification that is different from the certification used during the

2013-14 school year must be part of a full, summative evaluation . Finally, non-tenured teachers must be part of a full, summative evaluation annually.

Support professionals do not have an evaluation rating from the 2013-14 school year, since 2013-14 2 was a year of gradual implementation for support professionals. Therefore, all support professionals must be part of a full, summative evaluation for the first time under an approved evaluation system in 2014-15.

Principals are not included in this legislation; therefore, principals will continue to be evaluated annually.

Planning for Implementation

The legislation states that a tenured teacher with a Highly Effective rating shall be evaluated no more than once every three years and that a tenured teacher with an Effective rating shall be evaluated no more than once every two years. LEAs should develop a mechanism to divide the Highly Effective tenured teachers into three groups, in order to avoid the overburdening of administrators that this legislation sought, in part, to address. The first group should be evaluated in the upcoming school year, the second group in the 2015-16 school year, and the third group in the 2016-17 school year. Similarly the tenured teachers with an Effective rating should be divided into two groups, with the first group being fully evaluated in the upcoming school year.

Annual Conferences

The legislation also calls for annual conferences for all Highly Effective and Effective teachers who are in a cyclical year. As the legislation states: “The conference shall be in accordance with a process and scope determined by each school district’s educator

evaluation committee.” The purposes of these conferences may include but are not limited to:

- feedback on classroom walkthroughs;
- discussions about median growth scores when available and about other local student learning measures; and
- other feedback that will assist with professional growth and the improvement of instruction and student learning.

Provisions for More Frequent Evaluation

The legislation provides a mechanism for LEAs to require more frequent evaluations under two conditions. LEAs may call for more frequent evaluations as part of a negotiated collective bargaining agreement. Second, more frequent evaluations may occur if any concerns about a teacher’s performance arise at any time. Requiring more frequent evaluations must be done in accordance with local school-district policies and with any negotiated collective bargaining agreement. LEAs that have existing negotiated collective bargaining agreements that require annual evaluations must continue to provide annual evaluations until such agreements are renegotiated.

Triggers for more frequent evaluations may include but are not limited to:

- informal classroom walkthroughs;
- professional conduct; and
- median growth scores or other measures of student learning.

Next Steps

RIDE remains committed to working with LEAs to ensure that the Educator Evaluation System provides a mechanism and structure that supports ongoing improvement for every educator in our state, for the benefit of our students. The legislation speaks to the frequency of the evaluation cycle, not the content or process. There is still much work to be done together to strengthen both the models and their implementation. This work includes:

- adjusting the EPSS to account for the cyclical evaluations of Highly Effective and Effective tenured teachers. (We recommend that all caseloads or rosters be maintained, even if some staff members will not be evaluated in the 2014-15 school year. We will send further guidance in the next few weeks.);
- examining the current evaluation system components and requirements to make revisions based on implementation outcomes in LEAs;
- continuing to examine and refine the SLO process so that it aligns with strong instructional practices and well-designed curriculum-embedded assessments; and
- reviewing and revising the certification renewal process in light of the legislation, as there won't be annual evaluation data on every tenured teacher. Later this year, we will issue guidance on evaluations and certification.

Health & Safety:

5. New School and Youth Programs Concussion Act requires additional training for all school nurses

The School and Youth Programs Concussion Act, requiring school athletic coaches and volunteers to take an annual refresher course on recognizing concussions and traumatic brain injuries,

has expanded. The new law ([2014-H 7367A](#), [2014-S 2181A](#)) requires that *all school nurses* must complete a training course and an annual refresher course in concussions and traumatic brain injuries.

Concussion and traumatic-brain-injury training materials and resources are available on the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and on the Rhode Island Interscholastic League websites at the links below:

[Heads Up: Concussion in Youth Sports](#)

[Heads Up to Schools: Know Your Concussion ABCs](#)

Free training course: [Heads Up - Free Continuing Education - Concussion Training for Medical Providers](#)

[Heads Up to Clinicians](#)

[Heads Up App](#)

[RI Interscholastic League Concussion Management Information](#)

From the U.S. Department of Education

6. U.S. Department of Education issues guidance on use of student data

The U.S. Department of Education has announced new [guidance](#) for schools and districts on how to keep parents and students better informed about what student data is collected and how it is used.

In the guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Education [Privacy Technical Assistance Center](#), schools and districts are urged to be proactive in communicating how they use student

data. Information should be available to answer common questions before they are asked.

“Now more than ever, schools need data to monitor academic progress and develop successful teaching strategies,” said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. “At the same time, parents need assurance that their children’s personal information is being used responsibly. This guidance helps schools strike a balance between the two.”

The U.S. Department of Education Family Policy Compliance Office (FPCO) also announced a new companion website that includes a variety of resources and information regarding the federal laws FPCO administers and to help keep the public informed about the privacy and use of student records.

The new site, <http://familypolicy.ed.gov>, is aimed at being more user-friendly to help school officials, parents and students find the information they are seeking. In the coming months, the U.S. Department of Education will post decision letters from prior complaints handled by FPCO, which administers the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The website will also feature an online “community of practice” for school officials to share best practices, information, templates and other resources.

From other state agencies and offices

7. Attorney General’s Office schedules additional criminal-background check services

Please see this message from the Office of the Attorney General:

To assist teachers, school employees, and volunteers in obtaining the required criminal background checks mandated by Rhode Island General Law, Attorney General Peter F. Kilmartin is again offering backgroundcheck services at several locations throughout the state.

Under Rhode Island General Law 16-2-18.1, any person seeking employment with a private school or public school department who has not previously been employed by that public or private school department in Rhode Island during the past 12 months shall undergo a national and state criminal background check. Employees hired prior to August 1, 2001, and who have been continuously employed by a public school department in Rhode Island during the past 12 months shall be exempted.

As of July 2, 2014, employment now includes those individuals who are hired directly by the private school or public school department, contractual employees of the private school or public school department, and those individuals who may have direct or unmonitored contact with children or students who are hired by a third party who has contracted with the private school or public school department to provide services, including school bus monitors.

In addition, Rhode Island General Law 16-2-18.4 states that any person who is a current or prospective volunteer of a private school or public school department and who may have direct and unmonitored contact with children or students on school premises shall undergo a state criminal background check to be initiated prior to or within one week of commencement of such volunteer work. Under the

statute, the state criminal background check is valid for one year.

“Teachers, employees and volunteers are busy preparing for the school year. Bringing background check services to the community allows for them to focus on going back to school and teaching our students, not worrying about the logistics of driving to Providence, finding a place to park, and taking valuable time out of their busy day,” said Attorney General Kilmartin.

In addition to the regular hours of operation for the Bureau of Criminal Identification at the Office of Attorney General in Providence (Monday – Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.), the Office will provide national and state criminal background check services at the locations, dates and times below:

Date	Police Department	Address	Time
Tuesday August 5	Middletown Police Department	123 Valley Road Middletown	2 - 6 p.m.
Wed. August 6	Cranston Police Department	5 Garfield Avenue	2 - 6 p.m.
Tuesday August 12	Charlestown Police Dept.	4901 Old Post Road	2 - 6 p.m.
Wed. August 13	North Kingston Police Dept.	8166 Post Road	2 - 6 p.m.
Tuesday August 19	Smithfield Police Department	215 Pleasant Avenue	2 - 6 p.m.
Wed. August 20	Pawtucket Police Department	121 Roosevelt Avenue	2 - 6 p.m.
Thursday	Bristol Police	395 Metacom	2- 6 p.m.

August 21	Department	Avenue	
-----------	------------	--------	--

Individuals seeking a national background check must bring positive proof of ID, such as a valid driver's license, state-issued ID, or passport, as well as a letter of conditional employment. Payment must be a check or money order only. Checks should be made out to "BCI." The cost for a national criminal background check is \$35.

Individuals seeking a state criminal background check must bring positive proof of ID, such as a valid driver's license, state-issued ID, or passport. The cost for a state-only criminal background check is \$5. Payment must be a check or money order only. Checks should be made out to "BCI." The state criminal background check will be mailed to the individual.

For any questions, please call the Office of Attorney General, at 274-4400, and ask for BCI.

From other organizations

8. New England Institute of Technology offers free professional development for high-school educators

Please see this message from the New England Institute of Technology, courtesy of the Rhode Island Small Business Journal:

The New England Institute of Technology (NEIT) will offer free three-day Professional Development Seminars for high-school educators.

Classes will meet Tuesday, August 19, through Thursday, August 21, from 3 to 7 p.m., at the NEIT East Greenwich campus, 1 New England Tech Blvd. Space is limited for each seminar, so early registration is recommended. The following seminars will be offered:

- Object-Oriented Technology in Java: STEM Friendly
Offered by the Information Technology Department;
class limit: 16
- Kinesiology and Human Anatomy
Offered by the Physical Therapy Assistant Technology
Department; class limit: 15
- Expanding Your Classroom – Using Technology to
Engage Your Students
Offered by the Faculty Resource Center; class limit: 10
- At Your Best: Optimizing Your Professional and
Personal Effectiveness
Offered by the Business Management Technology
Department; class limit: 32
- Making Parts
Offered by the Mechanical Engineering Technology
Department; class limit: 15
- Software Design Tools
Offered by the Electronic Systems Engineering
Technology Department; class limit: 15

To register for a seminar, contact Tara Rugg, NEIT
Coordinator of High School Programs, at trugg@neit.edu, or
call 739-5000, ext. 3324.

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/CommissionerDeborahAGist/FieldMemos.aspx>